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AUTHOR Peterson, Karen L.; Roscoe, Bruce
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ABSTRACT

A study examined the work value preferences of young women in their late teens and early twenties. A descriptive self-report instrument was administered to 496 female undergraduate students at a midwestern university. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of 30 work values that were organized into two groups--work values that directly reflect work and career activity (such as status and monetary reward) and those values more closely associated with personal and situational variables. A total of 20 values were rated as important by 50 percent or more of the respondents; of these, 8 variables related to work and career preferences and 12 related to personal and situational preferences. Based on these results, it was recommended that instruments to assess the career interests of women comprise both questions relating to career factors and questions dealing with personal and situational factors. (MN)

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Young Women's Work Value Preferences

Karen L. Peterson Bruce Roscoe

Central Michigan University

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Running head: Work Preferences

Abstract

Undergraduate female students (N=496) were assessed concerning the degree of importance ascribed to work value preferences associated with paid employment. Data revealed subjects indicated preferences in two areas: those associated with work/career activity, and those aligned with personal/situational involvements. Results provide support for the proposition that women's career decisions involve a complex interplay between work related and personal value preferences.

In recent years a substantial amount of research has been generated on the vocational development of women. While these studies vary widely in scope, procedures employed, and implications for counseling, two general themes have emerged: (1) career decision-making and vocational development for women are highly complex and evaluation must include a variety of components (e.g., motivation, work values, role expectations, background factors); and (2) variables which affect career satisfaction change and require reevaluation as occupational skills, preferences, and personal values change with age and experience (Ginsberg, Ginsberg, Axelrod, & Herma, 1951; Psathas, 1968; Richardson, 1974; Zytowski, 1969; 1970). One issue with regard to further understanding women's work choices is deciding what type of assessment tool to use. It is necessary that whatever instrument is employed, that it be able to assess a broad spectrum of variables and allow for flexibility, validity, and applicability of results.

One solution has been the use of work values in assessing women's vocational choices (Super, 1970; 1973; Richardson, 1974; Zytowski, 1969; 1970). Work values are generally understood to be characteristics or properties important to an individual's choice of an occupation which enable an assessment of vocational development that is flexible, adaptable, thorough, and valid (Super, 1970; Zytowski, 1970). The use of work values for this purpose, however, is dependent upon an understanding that these variables are not stable imperatives but rather represent attributes which may be subject to change depending upon situational factors (i.e., age, level of skill, availability of employment, role perception) (Pryor, 1979). It is Pryor's position that the concept "work value preferences" (i.e., a statement of the relation between a person and a particular quality of work) represents a more precise definition of these variables as they are actually utilized in decision-making. The use of work value preferences provides two possibilities particularly useful in assessing women's vocational choices: (1) the grouping of work preferences into selected categories which may more accurately reflect occupational values at a given time; and (2) the

development of preferences which may be descriptive of specific populations and situations which have been ignored in less expensive models. Responses to these work value preferences may then be analyzed for those initially selecting an occupation and for those already engaged in work in an established profession. It would seem from this perspective that work value preferences provide a mechanism for accurately assessing occupational choices and part of an individual's vocational development, and as such would be useful for evaluating factors important to those involved in the intital selection of a career.

The purpose of the present investigation was to assess work value preferences of young women in their late teens and early twenties. There were two rationale for evaluating this particular population: (1) there still remains a gap in the literature in women's studies with respect to variables affecting the decision-making processes of young women, especially those who have been at least minimally exposed to the options of making vocational choices based on opportunities devoid of traditional sex-role expectations; and (2) the accumulation of base line data of the career values of young women is essential if professionals are to reliably comprehend the prolonged effects of changes in sex roles and patterns of development across the life span. As such, it is important that the behavior and attitudes of developing individuals be measured prior to their involvement in established employment situations.

Methodology

This study was a descriptive self-report utilizing female undergraduate students (N=496) at a midwestern university. Subjects were first and second year students with a mean age of 19.4 years. These women were selected for study as it was felt they were: (1) at the point of making a concrete decision regarding a choice of major; (2) not as yet firmly entrenched in specific course work; an

(3) could best respond without a significant bias to a major area of study. Data were collected during the fall and winter semesters of 1983 and 1984 by means of a paper and pencil instrument administered during regular class sessions.

The questionnaire used for data collection involved the listing of 30 work value preferences, each with a brief definition. These preferences included those found in the classic work value inventories (Eyde, 1962; Super, 1970; Zytowski, 1969; 1973) and those which have been found to be of merit when specifically evaluating the vocational development of women (Richardson, 1974; Psathas, 1968; Peterson, 1980). Respondents were asked to indicate the importance of work value preferences using a 1-5 Likert-type scale. Subjects recorded a value of "1" if the value was "very unimportant;" "2" if "unimportant;" "3" if they were "unsure how important;" "4" if "important;" and "5" if the value was felt to be "very important" in their selection of a job. For purposes of this review, data were analyzed using chi square test of goodness of fit and descriptive statistics.

Results

In order to best analyze the data the 30 work values were organized into two groups: (1) work values which directly reflected work/career activity (e.g., status; recognition; monetary reward) and (2) those values (or characteristics) more closely associated with personal/situational variables. Chi square test of goodness of fit revealed all work values differed from the hypothesized uniform and normal distributions at the .01 level of significance. These findings indicated young women had definite views, and placed marked levels of importance on the variables assessed. This was important in illustrating a factor often noted in the literature: that vocational choice for women involves the consideration of multiple variables. This is in contrast to studies which indicate males are influenced by only a few, highly significant factors when making vocational decisions.

Descriptive statistics proved to be more useful in analyzing the data when each value was examined by collapsing the five point scale to a three point scale (i.e., frequency and percentage scale points one and two, and four and five respectively were combined to provide a picture of those values which were rated as most important for these subjects.) With regard to work/career activity preferences, those rated as important by more than 50% of the subjects are reported in Table 1. It should be noted that five preferences not rated as important by at least 50% of the respondents fell into the category of work/career activity. These included the values of: (1) supervision (work completed under experienced direction); (2) fiscal management (making decisions affecting the allocation of money); (3) lengthy preparation (work requiring years of preparation and/or training); (4) self-employment (development and management of a personal business), and (5) travel.

Analyses of subjects' ratings of personal/situational preferences indicated 12 factors to be important (by at least 50 percent) in their selection of a job (see Table 2). Two preferences fitting into this grouping which were not found to be important were setting (work which is conducted in a business-like setting with many people) and atmosphere (work which is conducted in an informal, home-like setting). Again the indication is that these values were not clearly important to these women. Of the total 30 values, three were found to be rated as clearly unimportant by more than 50% of the subjects: craftsmanship (doing work with one's hands); intensity (work which is fast paced); and technical (work which requires skill with technical data and analusis). Overall the young women assessed in this study indicated a level of desirability for work preferences characteristic of work/career activity and personal/situational values.

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to assess the work value preferences of undergraduate women. Data indicated subjects had definite work/career and personal/situational preferences which they deemed important in their selection of a job. Taken as a whole, the results suggest that young women tend to consider several variables when considering the desirability of work. Two types of factors appear to be equally important in this consideration: those which are tied specifically to paid employment, and those which are of a personal nature and involve the situational or contextual aspect of work. It appears that regardless of those preferences which are seen as important in work (e.g., salary, promotion, recognition) these can be considered only when the presence of personal values is taken into account. These two types of variables are interrelated and do not appear observable as separate and unitary constructs.

Implications for those working with young women at the point of making career-decisions are twofold: (1) a multi-dimensional instrument which assesses a number of variables must be used when measuring interest and perceived satisfaction in career choice, because a tool examining only single factor may be inappropriate for use with women; and (2) the relationship between work/career preferences and personal/situational values must also be considered. How well these variables appear to "fit" may make a significant impact on the success of providing accurate and supportive guidance. For example, a woman who places a high degree of importance on work/career values of promotion and salary, and concurrently on personal/situational preferences of social service and personal associations may find these values to be at odds when put into practice in the "real world." The avoidance of these disparities is critical for successful career adjustment and satisfaction. Considering that most young women today will make a number of employment

changes during their lifetimes, an awareness of the impact and significance of work value preferences should make change easier and ultimately more rewarding.

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Table 1

Work/Career Preferences

Item	Percentage rating item as important
Security: Work which has a stable/secure future	95%
Getting ahead: Promotion provided in work	81%
Earnings: Work providing for high monetary compensation	76%
Responsibility: Decision making which affects the welfare of of others	73%
Status: Esteem and recognition of others provided in work	73%
Reputation: Work available in well-known, established firms	68%
Management: Responsibility for direction of others required	59%
Recognition: Results of personal efforts well-publicized	50%

Table 2

Personal/Situational Preferences

Item	Percentage rating item as important
Learning: Intellectual stimulation provided through work	95%
Surroundings: Work conducted in a comfortable environment	94%
Suitable work: Work within range of personal abilities	93%
Variety: Frequent changes provided in work undertaken	87%
Personal associations: Personal interactions with others in work setting	85%
Social service: Work which makes a worthwhile contribution	82%
Compatability: Work completion depends upon cooperation among co-workers	81%
Location: Work available in geographically desirable areas	79%
Creativity: Original thinking and expression in work	68%
Autonomy: Work provides for individual decision-making	64%
Apparel: Personal appearance and stylish clothing required in work	58%
Population: Association with a specific population required in work	55%